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STAFF PHOTO BY MARC VASCONCELLOS

Serving in Uzbekistan has given new meaning to Memorial Day for John Quinn, a member of the 972nd Military Police Company of the National Guard, both as a day to honor those who died defending this country and as a day to be with family.

## New veteran, new meanings for Memorial Day

By Brigid Alverson  
melrose@cnc.com

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John Quinn is a veteran now, but he isn't quite used to the idea yet.

Quinn returned to his Melrose home in March, after serving in Uzbekistan with the 972nd Military Police Company of the National Guard. This was his first Memorial Day as an overseas veteran, but he spent it thinking about others: serving in an honor guard for an American Legion post in Reading, visiting his father's grave, spending time with his family.

Memorial Day honors those who died in battle, and it is a time when veterans come together to remember their fallen comrades.

"I don't really think it has hit me about being a veteran yet," Quinn said. "A veteran, to me, is the World War II veteran who went away for five years. I was honored to be part of the honor guard, and the older veterans really appreciate that. That is part of Memorial Day too — the different generations of veterans getting together to talk about their experiences, things that have changed for the better, and some things that haven't changed at all, like army food. It's easier to talk about what they did, have a few laughs, with other veterans, because other people don't understand.

"I think Memorial Day, it's kind of simple. It's just a day of remembrance, a day of honoring the people who went before us. Especially nowadays, when people are always on the go, it is nice to have that one day off to relax, maybe visit a gravesite or someone who lost a loved one.

"People criticize it. They say it's a day off for a cookout, but I think that is just as important, to enjoy your family rather than make it a solemn day."